

Confirmed Minutes

Meeting:	Board of Directors' Meeting
Date:	25 November 2024
Time:	1 pm – 3 pm
Venue:	Room 401, Euston Road, Birkbeck College

Name	Designation
Carol Cook - Chair	Non-Executive Director
Melanie Fellowes	Non-Executive Director
Mark Levy	Non-Executive Director
Abdul Pisavadi	Non-Executive Director
John Fairhurst	Principal and Chief Executive Officer
Shabnam Karim	Chief Operating Officer and Chief Financial Officer
Alena Bakare	Student Representative
Sayed Sadat	Student Representative (Student President)
Victoria Hurley	Staff Representative (Professional Services)
Maria Jackson - Secretary	Head of Governance and Company Secretary

In attendance:

Name	Designation
Sunmi Ayorinde	Deputy Chief Operating Officer
Joan O'Mahony	Deputy Principal

PRELIMINARY ITEMS

1.0	<p>Welcome and Apologies</p> <p>C Cook welcomed everyone to the meeting, noting that there were no apologies.</p> <p>Declarations of interest</p> <p>There were no declarations of interest made.</p>
2.0	<p>Minutes for approval and Action Tracker/Matters Arising:</p> <p>2.1 <u>Minutes from the meeting of 30 September 2024</u></p> <p>The minutes of the meeting of 30 September 2024 were approved.</p> <p>2.2 <u>Action Tracker and Matters Arising</u></p> <p>C Cook highlighted the following from the Action Tracker where updates were due:</p> <p>November 2022 Meeting</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action 1 Item 20b – Update: As reported previously, the action (to ensure that consideration is given in advance of the next External Review of our governance arrangements to requesting an assurance of compliance with the OfS Conditions of Registration) will be considered in M Jackson’s internal review of our governance arrangements. <p>July 2024 Meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action 4 – Completed. See agenda item 9 below. • Action 7 – Update: Induction arrangements for M Levy were put in place and implemented. Meetings with J O’Mahony and A Jeram were to have taken place on 25 November 2024, but these have now been deferred as a result of availability issues. For the purpose of the action tracker, this action will be marked as completed. <p>September 2024 Meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action 1 – Completed. J O’Mahony confirmed that transfers of Level 5 students on Northampton’s Accounting and Finance Management degree to Wrexham’s Accounting and Finance Top-up were made where possible. • Action 2 – Completed. See Agenda Item 8 below for advice from J O’Mahony on the report(s) [e.g. the AMERs] that will capture academic performance beyond the minimum risk levels reported upon in the OfS Condition B3 reports being compiled by the Head of Compliance. • Action 3 – Completed. J O’Mahony has recommended that she submit an interim and final Academic Assurance Report to the Academic Committee and Board of Directors at the two joint meetings of the Academic Committee and Board of Directors (generally June and November), if it is decided that these joint meetings are convened. • Action 4 – Completed. The format of the end-year Academic Assurance Report and advice on who should receive it will be given under agenda item 9. • Action 5 – Completed. M Jackson advised the Head of Compliance that Compliance Reports should be presented to the Audit and Risk Committee as well as the Board of Directors. • Action 6 – Completed. The September 2024 APP KPI updates were included within the new APP Action Plan that the Board received for approval at its September 2024 meeting, but have also been submitted separately for clarity for the November 2024 Board meeting. • Action 7 – Completed. S Karim revisited the ratings for Risk 4.1 with the PTC Working Group. • Action 8 – Update: J O’Mahony had been tasked with advising Marketing about the proposals within our new APP so that they can advertise any commitments made as provisional at this stage (and in particular advise that the travel bursary might be being replaced for entrants for the October 2025 intake onwards). However, J O’Mahony has advised that the CFO advises marketing on relevant changes to bursaries. <p>Matters Arising</p> <p>There were no matters arising.</p>
<p>3.0</p>	<p>Chair’s Update [including Chair’s Action taken since previous meeting]</p> <p>C Cook confirmed that she had had no cause to take Chair’s Action on any matters since the September 2024 Board meeting.</p>
<p>STRATEGIC BUSINESS</p>	
<p>4.0</p>	<p>Principal’s Report (For information)</p> <p>The Board received the Principal’s Report. It had no questions to ask or issues to raise.</p>

<p>5.0</p>	<p>Agenda Proposals for the February 2025 Strategy Board meeting</p> <p>J Fairhurst reminded the Board that the Strategic Framework was due for review and that the new iteration would come into force with effect from September 2025. J Fairhurst also reminded the Board of its responsibilities regarding the Strategic Framework and the agreement reached previously to involve the Board in the review process at an earlier stage than in previous years. As a result, it had been agreed that the Board would focus specifically on strategy at its meeting in February 2025.</p> <p>J Fairhurst explained that the SLT had considered a possible agenda for the February 2025 Board meeting and had agreed that the primary focus should be on student recruitment and its linkage to financial matters. The Board agreed but C Cook asked nevertheless that Board members send any additional agenda items they might have to M Jackson for her to collate.</p> <p>C Cook said that in her Pre-Board meeting with M Jackson, they had discussed the ways in which the Board might be able to draw on the views of both staff and students in determining our new Strategic Framework. She said that one way might be to send out an email to invite any insights or observations staff and students might wish to share with the Board in advance of its February meeting.</p> <p>J Fairhurst explained that he would be gathering feedback from staff at the January 2025 Staff Meeting and suggested that they involve students in the process in the next Student Staff Consultative Forum. The Board agreed with this approach.</p> <p>Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All to submit to M Jackson any additional agenda items they might have for the February 2025 Board meeting on Strategy. • M Jackson to provide the Board with written feedback on the Strategic Framework discussion to be had at the January 2025 Staff Meeting in advance of the February 2025 Board meeting. • M Jackson to ask the Director of SEWS to ensure that the February/March 2025 SSCF have a discussion on the (re-drafted) Strategic Framework.
<p>ACADEMIC QUALITY AND THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE</p>	
<p>6.0</p>	<p>Student Guild Report</p> <p>S Sadat provided the following key updates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Student Guild continues to focus on student issues, including the cost of living, wellbeing, and fostering a sense of belonging. • The Guild provided Bloomsbury Institute with enhanced enrolment support in October 2024 and now has an even more visible presence on campus. The same is true of the Guild's Peer Advisors. • The Guild hosted an event at the Boom Battle Bar for all students but the particular focus of the event was to give a special welcome to new students joining in October 2024. The Guild is also hosting an end of year party for all students. • The Guild Manager, Student Staff Liaison Manager and the Head of Quality submitted an entry in Independent Higher Education's Empowering Student Voice category and were shortlisted. • The Guild has supported the Student Staff Liaison Manager in the creation of a Query Bank to support current and future student representatives. • The Guild has been extremely active on social media and has had 19,000 tiktok views. Of particular interest has been the demographic insights on user engagement. For example, the Guild has had viewers in Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds and Glasgow. <p>S Sadat thanked Bloomsbury Institute for the support it had given him during his time as President, referring to his election to the post as his proudest achievement in terms of the opportunity it has given him to serve</p>

	<p>a diverse range of students. In serving his fellow students he said he had helped to alleviate their stresses and remove barriers to their studies. As a result, he said that 2023-24 had been an outstanding year for him.</p> <p>As Student President, S Sadat said he was also proud to have had the opportunity to host 2 Student Guild AGMs and chair meetings of the Guild's Board of Trustees, to have supported the Guild's affiliation with the NUS, and to have helped bring attention to the mental health and wellbeing of the student body.</p> <p>M Jackson took the opportunity to report that three of our students had been appointed to IHE's Student Advisory Board.</p> <p>C Cook thanked S Sadat for the commitment and dedication he has shown as Student President which she said had contributed to the Student Guild becoming an even more dynamic body at Bloomsbury Institute. C Cook then congratulated A Bakare on her appointment as the new Student President.</p>
<p>7.0</p>	<p>Academic Committee</p> <p>7.1 <u>Academic Committee Report September 2024</u></p> <p>The Board received the September 2024 Academic Committee Report. It had no questions to ask or issues to raise.</p>
<p>8.0</p>	<p>Academic Performance Reporting</p> <p>J O'Mahony reported that going forward the Academic Performance Reports that she had been producing for the Board of Directors and Academic Committee over the course of 2023-24 would be replaced by an Annual Overview Report. She explained that she has been discussing with the Deputy COO the data to be captured within the report to address two particular issues relating to the clarity and speed of data. As a result of these challenges, J O'Mahony said that the decision has already been taken (a) to provide Module Leaders with excel mark sheets for their Module Monitoring Reports (MMRs) rather than have the Registry team spend a lot of time populating the current MMR templates, and (b) ask Module Leaders to complete their MMRs as soon as they have delivered the module.</p> <p>C Cook sought clarification on academic reporting and J O'Mahony confirmed that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the Head of Compliance is now reporting on performance of students against OfS Condition B3 to the Risk Management Working Group and Audit and Risk Committee, both of whom have a monitoring role in relation to this particular Condition of Registration. All such reports will be on the basis of confirmed data only i.e. data confirmed by Exam Boards. - J O'Mahony will be reporting generally on academic performance on an annual basis. <p>C Cook asked when it could expect to receive J O'Mahony's Overview Report. J Fairhurst said that consideration would need to be given to this as he was reluctant for a new report to be created for the Board when relevant reports are already being produced and considered by Course Committees, the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee and the Academic Committee. He said it was important for the reports to go through this formal scrutiny process. He also said he felt that a re-imagined Overview Annual Monitoring and Evaluation Report should be able to meet the Board's needs.</p> <p>J O'Mahony said that we would be able to speed up reporting to the Board by finalising MMRs more quickly than previously. She added that the Overview AMER might not have a full set of data but would have sufficient data to be of value to the Board.</p> <p>C Cook asked if we were collecting and analysing information in sufficient time to allow for changes to be made for the benefit of subsequent intakes. J Fairhurst confirmed that this was the case.</p>

	<p>C Cook asked J O'Mahony to provide the Board with a timeline for the collection and reporting of data.</p> <p>Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • J O'Mahony to provide the Board with a timeline for academic performance reporting to the Board.
9.0	<p>Academic Assurance Reporting Requirements</p> <p>J O'Mahony said that going forward she would present the Board with two Academic Assurance Reports each year – an interim one in June and a final one in November. Both reports would be presented at the Board's joint meeting with the Academic Committee [if it was decided to convene such joint meetings].</p> <p>J O'Mahony explained that the reports would include both internal and external academic assurances. Obvious external assurances would be results from the NSS and TEF submissions as well as External Examiner Reports.</p> <p>C Cook said that the Board was keen to reduce the burden of reporting but needed to ensure that reporting is both timely and relevant.</p> <p>M Jackson reminded the Board that Internal Audit were currently considering academic reporting as part of their advisory review of governance and said that they might have recommendations to offer in this space.</p> <p>C Cook asked who (at a sector level) receives Academic Assurance Reports. J O'Mahony said she had emailed Advance HE for advice on this point and had been informed that providers do not share such reports with all students; instead the reports are shared only with Academic Committees, governing bodies and other committees, as appropriate. The Board agreed to adopt the same approach.</p>
10.0	<p>Student Recruitment and Admissions Update</p> <p>J Fairhurst reported briefly on the launch of our Pre-sessional Programme, but said he would report fully on Student Recruitment and Admissions later in the meeting under Reserved Items.</p>
AUDIT AND RISK	
11.0	<p>Prevent Risk Assessment</p> <p>The Board noted that the Prevent Risk Assessment was not due for approval at the November meeting.</p>
12.0	<p>Access and Participation Plan 2020-21 to 2024-25 KPIs</p> <p>12.1 <u>APP KPIs November 2024 Update Report</u></p> <p>J O'Mahony presented the APP KPIs update report explaining that the data had previously been shared with the Board as it had been included within the Access and Participation Plan 2020-21 to 2024-25. She highlighted the following key points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have two data issues in that our cohort numbers are small, and we also had two years where we were not recruiting and so we have limited trend data. • Overall, our continuation data shows progress has been made from the initial starting point but with a marked increase in the gap in 2021-22 against our ethnicity and socio-economic objectives. These have been adopted as targets in the new APP that we submitted to the OfS in October 2024.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overall, our attainment data shows progress has been made from the initial starting point. For our most recent year of data (students who graduated 2022-23), we see positive gaps for three of our four target groups. As with continuation, our socio-economic and ethnicity gaps have been adopted as targets in our new APP. <p>J O'Mahony added that the OfS will take comfort from the fact that SEER are supporting us in our APP work.</p>
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FINANCIAL AND CORPORATE

13.0	<p>People, Talent and Culture Annual Report</p> <p>S Karim presented the People, Talent and Culture Annual Report and sought feedback on any areas that the Board would like to see included in future iterations of the report.</p> <p>M Fellowes said that the report was very comprehensive and that she did not feel it would be necessary for the Board to receive such a report every year. M Fellowes commented also on the findings of an internal audit report a year or so ago regarding a lack of consistency amongst Heads of Division/Department in terms of advertising and recruitment practices and suggested that the PTC Manager include within the report how this particular issue has been addressed. J Fairhurst explained that advertising and recruitment have been standardised as they are now managed by the PTC Manager.</p> <p>C Cook said that the report helped to provide the Board with an understanding of staff-related risks. However, she asked that the next iteration of the report focus also on compliance with future employment-related legislation.</p> <p>C Cook also commented on the pay gap analysis report that had been shared with the Board a few years ago. She said that the report had constituted a significant piece of analysis and that it was important not to lose sight of any work that had been undertaken on the back of the report. She therefore recommended that the next Annual Report reference what has been done since the pay gap analysis or what is to be done as a result. C Cook also suggested that a new pay gap analysis be undertaken in a few years' time.</p> <p>A Pisavadi said that it would be useful to include within the report information on the number of vacancies we have had (and currently have) over the course of the year. S Ayorinde said that she currently had one vacancy within her team.</p> <p>M Levy asked whether we were overstaffed given current student numbers.</p> <p>C Cook asked whether regular comparisons were made between the number of staff leaving and the number of new appointees to ensure that minimum staff levels are maintained, and suggested that staff resources be considered at the February 2025 Board meeting when discussing strategy.</p> <p>S Ayorinde suggested that the PTC Manager report on findings from exit interviews in future Annual Reports. J O'Mahony expressed reservations about this suggestion as she felt that staff might not be as open in their exit interviews if they knew that this information was going to be shared with the Board. C Cook acknowledged J O'Mahony's reservations but said it would be useful for the Board to know if there are any trends behind staff departures.</p> <p>Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> S Karim to advise the PTC Manager that the Board would welcome reporting on the following in the next iteration of the PTC Annual Report: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compliance with future legislation. Follow-up from the last pay gap analysis. How issues raised (e.g. inconsistent recruitment practices) have been addressed. Feedback from exit interviews in terms of identifying any common issues/trends.
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	To Note: There were no financial reports for this meeting.
NOMINATIONS AND GOVERNANCE	
14.0	<p>14.1 <u>Governance Updates – November 2024 Cover Paper</u></p> <p>14.2 <u>Governance Updates – November 2024</u></p> <p>The Board received the November 2024 Governance Updates Report.</p> <p>C Cook commented on the two Advance HE reports on University Annual Reporting and suggested that M Jackson share links to the reports with Evelyn Partners for benchmarking purposes.</p> <p>Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • M Jackson to share with the Internal Audit team at Evelyn Partners links to the two Advance HE Reports on University Annual Reporting referenced in her Governance Updates Report.
COMPLIANCE AND REGULATION	
15.0	<p>Compliance Report</p> <p>There were no reports for this meeting.</p>
16.0	<p>Health and Safety Annual Report 2023-24 [For information]</p> <p>S Karim presented the Health and Safety Annual Report 2023-24 explaining that whilst it was very operational in nature, it was an important report for the Board to receive. S Karim added that there was only one issue to be addressed and that relates to the need to ensure that with working from home options, we have sufficient First Aiders and Fire Marshalls on site at all times.</p>
17.0	<p>Access and Participation Plan 2020-21 to 2024-25 [For consideration]</p> <p>There were no update reports for the November 2024 Board meeting.</p>
18.0	<p>Access and Participation Plan 2025-26 to 2028-29 [For information]</p> <p>The Board received the Access and Participation Plan 2025-26 to 2028-29 for information with J O'Mahony explaining that she hoped to receive feedback from the OfS on the Plan before the Christmas closure period. J O'Mahony added that providers could expect the OfS to come back twice with requests for changes to be made to a Plan.</p>
POLICY AND DOCUMENT APPROVAL	

19.0	<p>Prevent Duty Annual Report 2023-24 [Recommended for approval by the SMT]</p> <p>The Board approved the Prevent Duty Annual Report 2023-24, and on the basis of the information contained within the Report, agreed that C Cook should sign off on the OfS Prevent Annual Accountability and Data Return for 2023-24 on behalf of the Board.</p>
OTHER BUSINESS	
20.0	<p>Any Other Business</p> <p>There were no matters for Any Other Business.</p>
DATE/TIME OF NEXT MEETING	
Date: 3 February 2025, 1 pm to 3 pm, Venue TBC	